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ABSTRACT

A brief review of language instruction in primary, secondary, and preparatory schools; colleges of education; and universities is developed in this article. General commentary concerning the outgrowth of the "language revolution", recognition of the importance of modern language study, extended teaching programs, new teaching methodology, language analysis, language research, and motivation research completes the survey. (PL)

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PÉDAGOGIE

The present position of modern language teaching in England and wales

We are in the midst of a veritable revolution in our thinking and practices concerning the teaching of modern languages. Already the revolution has brought about great changes in the aims and methods of our teaching and in our organisational arrangements in all types of educational establishment at all levels. It has far from run its course, and we may still be in for some surprises. (Did not the French Revolution of the common man, of *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité,* lead to a Napoleon Bonaparte, an Empire, and an attempt at world, or at any rate European, conquest ?). All we can say with confidence is that, when the world of modern languages settles down again, it is bound to look very different from what it is was when the first sparks of revolt flickered.

I am not going this afternoon to trace the history to date of the revolution, though I would like to underline two points : first, it started in the Second World War, in the adult sector, its immediate cause being the need of men and women of many different nations and tongues to communicate with each other, for reasons quite simply of self-preservation ; and, second, it is a world-wide revolution, although the course it has taken in the different countries has varied according to the circumstances of each. It has been farthest-reaching in those areas where language teaching had suffered most neglect (for instance, the USA) : on the other hand, its effect is only now beginning to be felt in Germany, where since Viëtor's time the provision for the teaching of modern languages has been generally good.

What I propose to do is to bring out what seem to me to be some of the most significant results of the revolution so far and then, to the extent that time permits, draw your attention to certain features in the main branches of our educational system.

Among the changes that are already discernible, pride of place must go to the general climate of opinion in which our teaching of modern languages is now given. Modern languages are no longer regarded as the preserve of the grammar schools and the university language departments, as matters of concern for a comparatively few people with specialised, or vested, interests. Our scientists have become aware of their importance to them, as tools in the pursuit of their studies, to such an extent that German and Russian, for example, are being taught in certain university departments of science, which make their own provision outside the language departments. Industry and commerce have reco-

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[*Note :* With minor changes and additions, introduced mainly in order to bring up to date the information provided, this article gives the text of the opening address delivered by **Dr. D.C. Riddy, C.B.E., H.M.I., Staff Inspector for Modern Languages ;** Department of Education and Science at a Conference organised jointly by the Department of Education and Science, London, and the Modern Languages Section of the Association of Teachers in Colleges and Departments of Education. The Conference was held at Harrogate, Yorkshire, from 8th to 11th October, 1965. Its proceedings formed the subject of a publication, « Modern Languages in Colleges of Education », issued at the cost of 5 shillings by the Modern Languages Section of the A.T.C.D.E. (151 Gower Street, London, W.C. 1)].

gnised the need they have of modern languages in the two reports of recent years published by the Federation of British Industries following the earlier Carr-Saunders report. The ordinary man and the ordinary woman now perceive the value of a knowledge of a modern language, a large number in direct connexion with their work, hundreds of thousands in their leisure-time pursuits on the Continent.

Reflecting this wide-spread recognition of the importance of modern languages has come a demand for the extension of their teaching, not only in the part- and full-time establishments of further education but also in the schools, and this demand has happily been coupled with a readiness on the part of authorities, both public and private, to spend money on an unprecedented scale on the provision of facilities. May I quote a few examples ? A recent survey conducted by the Educational Foundation for Visual Aids showed that by the spring of 1965 there were nearly 500 language laboratories in use in the country—a remarkable figure, especially when one bears in mind that the first language laboratory to be installed in a public educational institution in Britain (Ealing Technical College) dates back no further than 1961 (it was, however, preceded by that of the Shell Company in London). Of these laboratories, 29 were in universities, 22 in colleges of education, 124 in establishments of further education, and 206 in schools, while 20 others were being used jointly by, for instance, schools and colleges of further education. They were of almost all sizes, the smallest having 4 booths and the largest 38, but the most popular sizes, in order, had 16, 12, 20, and 32 booths. If the average cost of the laboratory were reckoned as no more than £ 2,000 (probably a conservative estimate), the total capital outlay on this one aid to modern language teaching will have been of the order of £ 1,000,000 ; and to this would have to be added the considerable cost of tapes for use of the booths. Again, an enquiry that I made of the main publishers and suppliers suggested that at least 5,000 audio-visual courses were in use by the autumn of 1964. Under a different head, much money has been devoted to the training of teachers, both in the use of the new aids (by the Department of Education and Science, by LEA's, by Institutes of Education, and by others) and in increasing the normal supply of language teachers, by the provision of special courses lasting a week for those who wish to add Russian to their teaching subjects in Holborn College of Law, Languages and Commerce, Liverpool College of Commerce, and Birmingham College of Commerce, now catering in all for 80 teachers a year) and of local part-time and national full-time courses for teachers in primary schools under the national part scheme—the full-time courses, lasting three months, have a total intake of 250 students a year (190 in France, 60 in Britain, at Holborn).

I have already hinted at the second big change affecting the arrangements for the teaching of languages. It is the general realisation that languages are needed not only by those whose main work will be linguistic in nature (teachers of languages, interpreters, and so on) but also by many others, as a tool subject in the pursuit of normal linguistic occupations. One cannot tell in advance which boys and girls at school are likely later on to need a language as a tool subject, but it is clearly desirable to equip as many as possible in this way—at present only about 50 per cent, of our pupils in secondary schools make any sort of contact with a modern language. If one cannot say which boys and girls will need a language, even less can one say which particular language may be required—if this language turns out to be German, it will not help directly if the pupil has learnt French. Hence it must continue to be one of the main responsibilities of the further education establishments to provide language courses. (Happily, recent experience has shown that the old quip about adolescence being, linguistically, the onset of

senescence just is not true !). But the task of the establishments of further education, can be kept within bounds only if there is far more teaching of languages in our schools—far more and also better.

As regards objectives and methods of teaching, there would probably now be fairly general agreement that languages ought to be taught in the first instance as means of communication, provided that this term is understood in its full sense, that is as including communication not only by the spoken word but also by the printed and written word—after all, mind speaks to mind through books and letters as well as through the medium of the voice. The implications of this proposition are probably not yet fully realised, but we do now recognise that in the schools we ought to spend far more time on teaching the language rather than on teaching *about* the language, as was all too often the case hitherto. As a consequence, more importance is now being given to the oral side of language work, and not merely in the first year or so of courses. In our oral work, more stress is being laid upon hearing and understanding foreign speech. In this, of course, we are greatly helped by the tape-recorder, which, because it can be made to repeat without difficulty, and always with the same pronunciation and intonation (in a way that a living teacher could scarcely rival), enables us to present the foreign language from the beginning at practically the normal speed of conversation. By means of the tape-recorder, also, we can familiarise our pupils with a variety of native voices, thus making them less dependent upon their class or set teacher. A much greater place is also being given to reading, hitherto (apart from the rather special exercise of reading aloud) the most grossly neglected of all our modern language pursuits, at any rate below the sixth form. Further, we are critically examining the forms of writing in which our pupils indulge, and more store is now being set on the pupils' ability to express their own thoughts in the foreign language rather than on translating other people's thoughts (if thoughts they were, at the level of the translation exercise in the middle reaches of schools). If communication is understood in its full sense, there is no longer any cause to fear that the new methods will lead to a lowering of cultural standards—on the contrary, indeed, these standards will be greatly raised, provided that we really do, at the proper time, provide pupils with opportunities for worth-while reading and for talking about matters other than those of immediate concern in making a purchase in a shop, ordering a meal, and asking one's way of a policeman.

In the last twenty years or so we have learnt much about the nature of languages, and especially about languages as they are spoken—thanks largely, in the latter case, to the perfecting of the tape-recorder, which has enabled scholars to catch for laboratory examination what was previously fugitive. Here the French took the lead, with their research leading up to the publication of *Le Français Fondamental premier et second degrés* (1), which listed the words most commonly used in conversation and in popular writing and offered some reflexions on the commonest structures. One does not need to endorse all the methods used in this work to recognise its importance (in particular one may feel hesitation about the means used to determine which are the *mots disponibles* and about the scientific backing for the observations on structures). A fascinating description of the work is to be found in *L'Elaboration du Français Fondamental* (*1er degré*) by Gougenheim, Michéa, Rivenc and Sauvageot, published by Didier.

This work of analysis has now been extended to German, through Professor Pfeffer of the U.S.A., the first of whose proposed nine volumes

(1) Published by the Institut Pédagogique National.

is now available (2) ; it will be continued in the project recently launched by the German authorities themselves, in which the chief emphasis will be on the analysis of structures rather than of lexis and which is expected to take ten years to complete.

« I have no intention of trespassing on the territory of our next talk, which will deal with the importance of linguistics in the training of our future teachers of modern languages. Nevertheless, I would like to mention... » would like to mention the value, especially to modern languages teachers in establishments of further education, of the new appreciation that in language usage there are different ' registers ', with the fact is given practical application in language courses, it enables teachers to gear their instruction more precisely to the needs of students, especially in the matter of vocabulary : thus the air-hostess needs high competence in a comparatively narrow field ; and so does the technician about to install a paper-making plant in Italy. But it is to be hoped that the teaching will take due account also of the fact that the air-hostess is not all the time ministering to the needs of passengers in the air, or the plant-installer working on his trade for 24 hours in the day ! As persons, we all have needs apart from those of our job.

I suppose that, as teachers, we have always been aware that language proficiency depended on a complex of factors, among them of course physiological ones. We have known, in a general way, that motivation was one of these factors, but I doubt whether we have realised how important motivation was. Unquestionably it is motivation that has helped adults to secure some of the remarkable results in language learning that we know about. Motivation may, indeed, be more relevant to the learning of languages than physiological facts—this, at any rate, is the view of some Swedish experts, who have found it difficult to explain on other grounds why children starting English at the age of 7 have not shown themselves better in speaking the language than those who have started at the age of ten. We have learnt much about motivation in the last decade or so, but we probably have much more to learn, certainly in so far as boys and girls of school age are concerned.

This brings me to the last point that I want to make about the changes that have already resulted from the revolution in thought concerning modern languages—we have realised the importance of research not only into languages themselves but also into the whole language-learning process. It is almost certain that some teaching practices have continued only because of the tendency of one generation of teachers to recall (as they often do, with great affection) the methods of their own teachers. It may well be for this reason that so much time continues to be devoted to translation into the foreign language, an exercise dear to the teachers of classical languages, on whom the first teachers of modern languages modelled themselves in the not-so-distant past. But research will not cause us to relinquish all our classroom practices, some of which represent the refinement of years of trial and error through succeeding generations—and not all teachers have accepted tradition uncritically. We ought, however, to welcome research into all the elements that go to make up language proficiency—the more we know about each, the better we shall be able to teach ; and I hope that we shall be willing, in so far as our normal duties leave us with the time, to contribute to research. My impression is that so far research has been concentrated on the early stages of language learning—what seems to me to be wanted now is research into the middle stages, that difficult period for the pupil and the teacher, when the first fine enthusiam of the learner may have passed, when progress seems slow because of the

(2) Pleffer J. A. : *Grunddeutsh* Vol. I (*Basic*) *Spoken German Word List.*

need to keep up to pitch what has already been learnt as well as to acquire new knowledge, and when the pupil has not yet reached the point from which he can see the goal of reasonable all-round competence in the language. But you will be hearing more about research into languages and the language-learning process from Dr. Farrer-Brown, who is the Chairman of the national Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages, a body created as an indirect result of the recommendations of the Hayter, Annan, and other reports.

Now for a few words about the provision for modern languages in our schools and collèges. My colleagues, Miss Mulcahy and Mr Jones, will be dealing with primary and with secondary schools respectively, and I can leave details to them. But one or two points I would like to make here. As regards primary schools, it is sometimes forgotten that ,in this country, we have more experience of teaching a modern language to boys and girls from the age of about eight than most countries—I refer, of course, to preparatory schools, which have traditionally included a language (French, as well as Latin) in their curriculum. Preparatory schools differ so widely from maintained primary schools in some respects (notably, of course, in their size of class and in their clearly-defined examination objectives for their pupils at the age of about 13), that most of the lessons they have for us in French teaching can have little relevance to the primary schools. One general lesson, however, is very much to the point : it is that, when the teaching is good, the advantages of an early start on French are indisputable : but, conversely, when the teaching is not good, harm rather than benefit results. It is therefore important that the teaching of French in primary schools should be good ; if it is not good, the secondary schools will not have the possibilities possessed by the public schools for applying remedies measures, through, for instance, their smaller classes and, at any rate in the boarding schools, private coaching outside the normal hours of teaching. In general, I think you will agree that the arrangements made under the pilot scheme for French teaching to pupils from the age of eight are as good as they could be in all the circumstances. But there is a real danger, to which the steering committee of the pilot scheme has already drawn the attention of LEA's : it is that unco-ordinated 'private-venture' experiments outside the pilot scheme and indeed outside any local scheme may bring discredit on the whole idea of teaching modern languages in primary schools. A survey recently carried out by the Schools Council suggests that the number of teachers engaged in teaching French outside all schemes is more than twice the number of teachers so engaged in areas with schemes, whether national or local. The situation outside the scheme areas may not be very different from that revealed some 2 1/2 years ago in the Lazaro report, published by the Nuffield Foundation.

I have already mentioned one of the characteristics of modern language teaching in secondary schools : at present, it is given to no more than 40 per cent, of an age-group. Other matters calling for attention are the inadequate attention paid to languages other than French (here the pilot scheme for French teaching in primary schools may help, since it should be known which entrants to secondary schools who have already done three years of French could with profit start a second language at once, and with longer courses more pupils ought to be able to tackle a second language and to receive a more satisfactory introduction) and the ridiculous practice of allowing most of our pupils who stay on at school to drop their language after they have taken the external examination at the ordinary level, an examination a pass in which does not guarantee a sound all-round knowledge of a language. The pattern of our examinations is changing : the coming

of the CSE examination is a new element of importance, and under the guidance of one of the members of our conference (Miss Turner, of Oastler College) the Manchester School of Education has been conducting a most valuable experiment at this level ; one of the eight GCE Boards has already totally abolished the requirement of translation into the foreign language at the 'O' level examination, three others either have already or are about to introduce alternative syllabuses in the same sense (all expecting candidates to show greater proficiency in oral work and in rapid silent reading), and yet another has a remodelling of its syllabus under active consideration ; the Modern Language Association has nearly completed its project for trying out the feasibility on a large scale of an examination of GCE 'O' level standing that calls for no translation either way and aims at refining the techniques of oral examining ; and the Schools Council is devoting attention to the question of the syllabus and examinations at the advanced level—on these questions my own paper issued to you as a background document for the present conference may suggest one possible line of approach. One notable fact in relation to the present GCE examinations is that girls do consistently better than boys at both levels and in all languages (except Russian and Welsh at the higher level)—I don't think this is to be explained solely by the natural interest of girls in language and literature.

We shall be devoting special consideration to the problems of colleges of education. Here I may mention the growth in the number of students taking main French—first-year students in 1962-63 numbered 429, in 1963-64 614, in 1964-65 968. This growth has been a natural one, not required in any way by official policy, which must await the outcome of the national experiment in the pilot project. Opportunities for study abroad for students taking main French include the six-month courses at Tours, Caen, and Paris (now catering in all for 150 students a year), the exchanges with *écoles normales* (240 each way last year), and the foreign study grants of £ 5 a week ; in addition, there is the possibility of a year as *assistant* either intercalated in the student's course of study or taken immediately afterwards. I hope you will let me know before the conference ends whether these arrangements are working well and are adequate for present needs. Courses in languages other than French need careful consideration, both because of the limited nature of the opportunities that the students will have afterwards of teaching these languages and because of the restricted number of students who enter the colleges of education with good qualifications in the other languages—last year 1,780 entrants had taken French successfully at the advanced level of the GCE compared with a total of 430 in all the other languages combined. By agreement at the Conference of Institute Directors, consultation between Institute and the Department of Education and Science takes place before any course in a modern language other than French is instituted.

The most momentous change concerning the colleges of education has of course been that, with the coming of the three-year courses, they can aspire to prepare students directly for the teaching of French, whereas previously it was usually considered necessary for the student to add a supplementary course of one year in Paris. No less momentous has been the change in the status of languages in the colleges of further education. Here teaching is no longer restricted to those who require a language for secretarial or commercial purposes—courses, intensive and otherwise, now cater for all sorts of students, some of them of degree level, in a vast range of languages (at Holborn, for instance, courses are offered in 23 languages, ranging alphabetically from Afrikaans to Yoruba). It was of course in the establishments of further education,

free as they were to a large extent of the incubus of tradition, that the new methods of teaching first gained a foothold.

Time prevents my dealing in any detail with language teaching in the universities, but even so I must at least mention first that their annual output is of the order of 2,000 language graduates, about half of whom have taken French ; that about 40 per cent, of these graduates enter the teaching profession (though the proportion is smaller for those European languages that are still little studied in schools) ; that the pass (as distinct from the honours) graduates may have had little experience of speaking the language of language they study and so be handicapped in using modern teaching methode in the schools ; and that in the newer universities there are more interesting arrangements for the provision of language-teaching cent to linked with a variety of honours schools (*e.g.* departments of literature of comparative studies, of government).

I can only hope that this most inadequate survey has given a some idea of the developments that are taking place at all levels language study. Perhaps your questions will enable me to fili gaps.

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